


From the Gospel: tackling climate change will require love


Loving others as oneself emphasises the strong bond between us and others

Community

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Climate change

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 3 min read



I love others as I love myself when I make an extra effort not to give in to the culture of exploitation; when I am sensitive to the cumulative effects that my small but repetitive actions have on others no matter how distant.

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Today, 196 countries, plus the EU, are gathering around a table in Glasgow to discuss what practical actions must be taken to protect our environment for our benefit and that of future generations. The meeting, known as COP26, has set as its common target reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 in order to limit global warming to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels.

But COP26 is more than just about haggling about a few degrees here and there, or about the vanishing of glaciers and ice caps that most of us never see in any case. At the heart of the conference are entire communities at risk because they are at the mercy of the attitude of unbridled exploitation carried out by more powerful and affluent nations in the name of progress and development.

Five years ago, on the eve of COP21 which was held in Paris, Pope Francis released his encyclical [*Laudato si'*](#), “on the care of our common home”. The encyclical brought home that caring for creation is not merely about investing in more sophisticated technologies that produce less carbon dioxide. This would simply make more acute the myth that all our problems can be addressed through our technological prowess. Rather, our care for creation must be shown through love of others in very tangible ways.

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In today’s gospel, when the scribe who asks Jesus which is the first among all the commandments, he is asking Jesus which of the 613 precepts that the Jews held is first, so that all the others can be interpreted in its light. To this question, Jesus replies by giving a new interpretation to age-known commandments, while giving the scribe an entirely new outlook on how life is to be lived.

By joining the two commandments of loving God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind and strength, to that of loving one’s neighbour as oneself, Jesus is offering a way of life to live by. Here, Jesus is not on some airy-fairy spree of sentimentality. Rather, he is being very practical, concrete, and even demanding.

The physical connotations of “heart” and “strength” with which we are to love God, along with “soul” and “mind” attune us to the embodied dimension of love that is demanded of us, and without which love is never complete.

I love others as I love myself when I make an extra effort not to give in to the culture of exploitation; when I am sensitive to the cumulative effects that my small but repetitive actions have on others no matter how distant; when I broaden my vision to include also those who are invisible to the “economic gaze”, and act accordingly.

Loving others as oneself emphasises the strong bond there is between us and others. This opens us up to a countercultural lifestyle by putting into relief the interdependence that marks our hyperconnected world.

Nowhere is this clearer to see than in our care for creation. The deeply-ingrained plundering attitude with which we relate with creation and with vulnerable populations has backfired gravely. In other words, love of self has morphed into a self-serving vice of greed, reducing love of others to little more than a supererogatory good deed of the day.

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Love of others and love of self cannot be separated. It is not restricted to the proverbial good deed of the day. In its fullest sense, it effuses through concrete personal lifestyle changes, family and community practices, corporate values and government policies.

Efforts to curb climate change that risk becoming merely a technological challenge and a burden are insufficient and short-lived unless we resolve to really love God with all of our being, and to love others as ourselves.

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